

**Remarks for Secretary Hilda L. Solis  
Town Hall, Community College Regional Summit  
Community College of Philadelphia  
Monday, February 28, 2011**

Thank you for having me here this morning.

Secretary Duncan, it's great to be here with you!

And thank you Raquel for that great introduction.

Your story is inspirational and necessary to the conversation we are having here today.

And my many thanks to Dr. Steven Curtis, President of the Community College of Philadelphia, and his team for hosting us here today.

And greetings to all the community college representatives, stakeholders, and students who are here today.

It's great to be here with all of you.

Thank you for the work you do everyday to educate, train, and inspire people all across this country.

I know it's not easy.

I know the times you face are the toughest in generations - big budget cuts, bursting enrollment numbers, and high numbers of unemployed coming back to get re-trained...

But still, you continue to give those most in need a chance.

You continue to open doors of opportunity.

In the midst of great adversity, you continue to care, provide guidance, and create economic growth.

On behalf of President Obama, and from the bottom of my heart, thank you!

Adversity is nothing new to all of you.

Indeed, it has tested higher education many times before, especially during fiscal crisis.

But, as history has shown us: We've come out better, smarter, and stronger because of it... We'll do it again! We have to!

I understand what you're going through. I know because I've been there.

Some of you may know that my first elected office was to the Rio Hondo Community College Trustees, in California.

And I grew up in a community where these campuses are needed the most.

I understand their value to working people and their families; to business communities; and to the economic prosperity of our country... Like all of you, I believe in them.

I'm here today to convey that belief;

To help connect the dots between the good work of community of colleges with that of this administration;

And to highlight the ways in which we can all work together to better educate this nation and win the future for all Americans!

This morning, Secretary Duncan and I toured the District 1199 C's Training and Upgrading Fund Learning Center.

Funded in part by the Department of Labor and the Department of Education, they've fostered a labor-management partnership to create career pathway programs in nursing, allied and behavioral health, and health information, and technology.

And they're doing it hand-in-hand with employers.

Together they've developed customized curriculum, and flexible training programs.

Not only have they accelerated learning, but they've created a meaningful and direct pipeline for their graduates to businesses right here in Philadelphia.

And guess what: It's working.

Last year, they helped 18,990 people get certified in health professions.

President Obama has called this our Sputnik moment.

And just like President Kennedy challenged this country to make it to the moon, President Obama is challenging us to create jobs of the future — careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

The program at 1199C is doing that.

And programs like it at all of your schools are doing it too.

And rest assured that we are taking notice, and we are committed to helping you.

Because we need to do more.

We're here to help meet the President's goal — that by 2020, this nation will have the best educated most competitive workforce in the world.

And to ensure that we give 5 million new students a community college education to get there.

The President has also asked that every American commit to at least one year of higher education to help us get there.

It makes sense.

Especially when you consider that the demand for skilled labor — largely in technology — is projected to grow significantly over the next decade.

These will be white, blue and green collar jobs that pay family sustaining wages and can be found in every sector of the economy, from manufacturing to renewable energy, broadband, healthcare and information technology.

Between 2008 and 2018, 21 of the 30 fastest-growing jobs will require a postsecondary certificate or degree.

And nearly half of all of the openings over the next decade will be for "middle-skill jobs" — jobs that require more than high school but less than a college degree.

Folks, the Presidents' got it right.

If we are going to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build the rest of the world, this is where our investments need to be!

It's what we need to do! It's where, together, we make the difference!

And we know community colleges are going to make it happen!

It's why we continue to make historic investments in our community colleges.

Because we know that when we invest in you and the communities you serve, we not only build a better middle class, we build a brighter future for all Americans!

Today, your programs, the certificates and credentials you offer, are more attractive, and more competitive than ever.

The opportunity to earn credentials in less than two years is increasingly appealing to young adults who are at-risk, out-of-school, or have some other barrier to employment.

It's real to them. It's something most feel they can do — I'm sure the students here agree, right?

About half of all first-generation and minority students attend community college.

The value of credentials cannot be overstated. But they need to matter!

I'm sure the employers in the room agree, right?

Credentials can't just be a piece of paper. They need to mean something.

They need to match the skills employers need to prosper.

To employers, credentials need to mean skills. They need to mean talent.

For workers and job seekers, credentials mean higher earnings, greater mobility, and better job security.

And you know better than anyone — community colleges are the link between the two.

That's why last year the Department of Labor awarded over \$500 million in grants to more than 300 community colleges.

And Community College of Philadelphia is making the most of it... .

This campus was awarded \$3 million from our Pathways out of Poverty Grants to train the unemployed, ex-offenders, and veterans in green manufacturing.

Their program is linked directly to over 25 Philadelphia employers to make sure that curriculum matches the skills they need to do business.

Just last month, Secretary Duncan and I announced the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Program — \$500 million dollars!

That's a big deal. Its money directly to all of you to help our nation's most in need.

These grants encourage community based partnerships and create opportunities for colleges and employers to build capacity, and create curriculum and training programs that result in meaningful credentials... and a job.

Talk about building the future... we're doing it!

And today, I'd like to announce two more ways we plan encourage this kind of innovation:

First — today the Department of Labor will begin to solicit applications for the Career Pathways Innovation Fund Grant Program.

This summer, we will award \$122 million through these grants — including \$65 million for healthcare-focused projects.

This program helps individuals with varying skill levels earn credentials along career paths in high growth sectors.

They'll also help incumbent workers who need training to secure full-time employment, advance in their careers, or retain their current occupations.

Additionally — we are announcing \$17 million in grants to serve to serve young ex-offenders, ages 16 to 24, in high-poverty, high-crime communities.

All too often these, these kids return to home only to commit more crime. With these funds — and strategic partnerships — we hope to improve their readiness and prospects for good jobs.

That's how we put this country back to work

Collaborating to make curriculum relevant to the needs of industry and working together to make sure credentials provide the skills businesses need.

And make no mistake; we will do everything we can to help.

The work you do deserves nothing less!

As President Obama likes to say, we're doing big things!

This school, all of you here today are doing big things!

And the work we do together — the good work of educating this country — will shape our destiny.

It's the only way we re-build this nation.

It's the only way we stay in the game. It's the only way we win the future.

Thank you so much for having me here today!

God bless you and God bless the United States of America!